

Amazon facing new lawsuits alleging racial, gender bias

 thehill.com/policy/technology/554527-amazon-facing-new-racial-gender-bias-allegations

Rebecca Klar

May 20, 2021

Five women from across Amazon's corporate offices and warehouses are accusing the e-commerce giant of racial and gender bias discrimination, according to lawsuits filed Wednesday.

The cases come from several of Amazon's facilities, including in Arizona, Washington, California and Pennsylvania, and the women held a variety of positions in the company, including in corporate offices, Amazon Web Services and warehouse facilities.

An Amazon spokesperson said the company is conducting "thorough investigations for each of these unrelated cases" and has "found no evidence to support the allegations."

"Amazon works hard to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture. We do not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form, and employees are encouraged to raise concerns to any member of management or through an anonymous ethics hotline with no risk of retaliation," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The women are represented by Wigdor law firm, which also represents Charlotte Newman, a Black Amazon manager who sued the company in March over allegations of racial discrimination and sexual harassment.

In response to Newman's suit, the company also said it would investigate and issued the same statement about fostering a diverse and equitable culture.

The new lawsuits are filed on behalf of Tiffany Gordwin, a 38-year-old Black woman, Diana Cuervo, a 40-year-old Latina woman, Cindy Warner, a 59-year-old gay woman, Emily Sousa, a 23-year-old Asian American woman, and Pearl Thomas, a 64-year-old Black woman.

Gordwin, a senior HR Specialist at Amazon who works in Arizona, alleges her all-white supervisors treated her like a "second-class citizen" and retaliated against her for complaining about racial bias.

Cuervo, a Level 5 Area Manager in delivery operations for an Amazon facility in Everett, Wash., alleges she was subject to racial and ethnic harassment by her white male supervisor, including comments such as "Latins Suck" and "You are a Latina woman, I need to be careful every time I talk to you." Cuervo says she was unlawfully terminated weeks after complaining about the racial discrimination and harassment, and just days after reporting a gas leak at the facility.

Warner, who worked at Amazon's Web Services as a global leader in California, alleges her white male manager verbally abused and discriminated against her, including calling her "bitch," "idiot," and "nobody." She also alleges she was prohibited from applying for a higher level role for which she was qualified, and that she was unlawfully fired in retaliation after her complaints of discrimination and after Amazon learned of her decision to pursue legal claims.

Sousa, who worked as a manager at an Amazon facility in Pennsylvania, says she faced repeated sexual and racial harassment by a male manager. She alleges she was demoted by three levels after rebuffing the manager's advances, and that the company failed to take any action after a "sham" investigation when she reported the harassment.

Thomas, who worked in HR for Amazon in Washington, alleges she faced racial discrimination including being called the "n-word" by her direct supervisor after he seemingly thought she hung up during a call complaining about racial hostility by another colleague.

She also says a representative tried to dismiss her complaints in a meeting in early April by telling her she was upset because of news about the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer who was later convicted on all charges in the death of George Floyd.

Thomas alleges she has been retaliated against by her supervisor, who has attempted to bombard her with assignments to set her up to fail.

The allegations in the new lawsuits echo those made by Newman. That complaint, filed in March, alleged Amazon routinely engages in "de-leveling" Black and Latino employees when they are hired, meaning they are hired at a level below the job they applied for or will be performing and lead to lower compensation and longer paths for advancement.

Amid the accusations, Amazon is recommending shareholders reject a proposal to conduct an audit on the "impacts on civil rights, equity, diversity and inclusion" at its upcoming May 23 shareholders meeting, according to the company's proxy statement.

Amazon said it does not support the proposal "because the Company is already proactively engaged in addressing these matters," according to the Proxy statement.